form the idea that, if a good teacher is teaching well, learning is taking place. Teachers know that, even in ideal situations, only *some* learning takes place by *some* students *some* of the time. That is the reality we live with.

There is no doubt that the public opinion about French has established that the purpose of the standard French program in our schools is to train students to speak French. There are many reasons for this.

MOST ADULTS WISH THEY COULD SPEAK A SECOND LANGUAGE.

First of all, most adults wish they could speak a second language, and, since they cannot, they wish it for their children. When their children cannot speak French, parents are disappointed for a second time.

Secondly, since 1966, the Departments have placed great emphasis on the development of oral skills. This, combined with teacher enthusiasm for this ideal, has produced the myth of possible orally-fluent graduates. Since neither the Departments nor the teachers have done anything to inform the public that oral fluency is an *impossible* goal for the standard French program, the public continues to feel that teachers are failing and programs are no good.

ORAL FLUENCY IS AN IMPOSSIBLE GOAL FOR THE STANDARD FRENCH PROGRAM.

By the way, I am talking all the way through here about the standard French program, not immersion. Immersion is a completely different set of circumstances. Standard day-to-day short period that a student may have.

If teachers and programs were *different*, in the minds of the public, students would be speaking French. The truth is that, even if every classroom were staffed by an ideal teacher working with ideal materials, oral fluency would still be an impossibility. This is a fact that we must clearly establish in the public's mind and has to be accepted.

WHAT WE DO ACHIEVE IN OUR FRENCH COURSES HAS VALUE AND HAS PURPOSE.

Although special programs such as immersion are achieving thrilling results, it is not an obvious answer to put all Canadian children into an immersion situation. And so the public must be convinced by us that what we do achieve in our French courses has value and has purpose.

The Politicians

The next group to consider is the politicians, both provincial and federal, for they have a strong influence on what happens in the classroom.

Provincially, education is the responsibility of the political party in power. Therefore, for political reasons, they must stand behind their decisions even if they realize they have made a mistake. For example, suppose that the Department legislates that all boards are to institute a French Oral Program. That means that the boards must invest taxpayers' money in costly materials and equipment. Then the Department discovers that such an approach is not producing positive results. The Ministry dare not change its policy for fear of incurring political backlash. Even though teachers know that the students are not getting the best opportunity to learn, the Department must allow sufficient time to pass until it can remould public thinking, change the program and escape political repercussions.

In Canada, we suffer other political interferences that cause unimagined problems for teachers and students of French. It is unfortunate that the Federal Government has turned language into a political issue. It is impossible to study French as a language in Canada. It is possible only to study Canada's second constitutionally-legal language, the language of the Quebeckers "who are making all those demands, who are thrusting their language down our throats, who are trying to take over the country, those bunch of stupid frogs." A young child whose mind has digested such attitudes at the supper table does not make a motivated student of French the next morning in class.

The Official Languages Act legally ensures the rights of a French-speaking Canadian to do his federal business in French,

and to work in the language of his choice. Canadians accept this and they pay for it. However, when the government creates in Canadian minds the idea that the Frenchification of the country goes far beyond what is needed to meet these basic rights, then there is a negative backlash, not only to French-speaking Canadians, but unfortunately also to the French language itself.

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO STUDY FRENCH AS A LANGUAGE IN CANADA.

The public must realize that the teacher of French faces this negative attitude in the classroom. It may be expressed aloud or it may silently sap student motivation.

The former Commissioner of Official Languages did little to help us. Fresh from a disastrous excursion into making civil servants bilingual, he did not hesitate to inform the Canadian public about the "dismal performance of schools," "pitifully inadequate programs," that the teaching of French in the schools of Canada is a "country-wide catastrophe" (he was talking about us, you realize), that the teachers of French are "wooden and constipated," and even if they are not worthy of a fully derisive laugh, they merit "half a laugh." These are quotes from his reports.

THE INTERFERENCE OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IS A DANGER THAT DOES FACE US.

Having failed with adults in Civil Service French Courses, the Federal Government is now eyeing the young people, and making noises that suggest that, if it had control, it would produce French-speaking students. The interference of the Federal Government is a danger that does face us.

To repeat my initial statement, in the face of all these considerations, "it is a tribute to the commitment of the teachers of French that they have remained, and do remain, in the classroom." It hasn't been my intention to sink us all into a stygian darkness of despair. Twenty-seven years of successful

experience with young people gives me the courage to defend them, to question, and to stand up to the paralizing influences of the "big brothers" of our educational world.

SOME OF US HAVE EXAGGERATED DREAMS

Until we look at our situation clearly and honestly, we cannot take effective action. Until we assess carefully, we can never establish clear goals that can be realized. Nor can we define what it is that prevents us from achieving our goals. Whether the weaknesses lie without, or deeply within ourselves, we must be able to recognize them. And some of the weaknesses do lie within ourselves: some of us have exaggerated dreams of beautiful pronunciation, of structural accuracy - a purity that is not achieved by any French-speaking children of the same age.

What can we do to improve our situation?

First, we must announce loudly and clearly that we are teachers first, and teachers of French second. I think this is a point that language teachers lost several years ago. We are teachers first, and teachers of French second.

WE ARE TEACHERS FIRST, AND TEACHERS OF FRENCH SECOND.

As teachers, our interest is to help young people to develop the ability and talents they may possess as human beings, not merely as students of French. Our dedication is to help them to discover what their potential is, and then to motivate and inspire them to do the sweat-work necessary to realize this potential. Our challenge is to prepare them, no matter what their abilities, to find a way of life that offers them the necessary personal satisfaction within the necessary social structure. I am talking about working with human beings; I am not talking about teaching a subject.

As teachers we are interested in our students as human beings, not as potential bilingual civil servants, not as linguists or translators.

We must also clearly establish that, given the fact we work with human beings, given the social standards that surround us, given the organization of the school, given the size of the classes we deal with, given the time we are allowed, given our full responsibilities to young people, given all this, any expectation of bilingualism is unfounded.

IT IS DIFFICULT TO LEARN A SECOND LANGUAGE.

We must explain why it is so difficult to learn a second language; why it seems that so little is achieved.

How many times do parents say: My son has been taking French for seven years and still cannot go into a restaurant and take care of a meal? We as teachers must make these explanations. If we do not, others, far less qualified, step in, make false judgements, and shape our future and the future of our students.

WE AS TEACHERS MUST MAKE THESE EXPLANATIONS.

We must explain that, to learn a second language, one must develop new language habits, new language skills. To develop habits or skills implies concentrated application, motivated and intensive practice, by an individual over long periods of time. If we relate these demands to our average student in the classroom, what demands concentrated application, motivated and intensive practice over long periods of time, if we think of our standard student in the classroom, we soon discover why students do not make more progress in developing control of French as a means of communication.

First of all, let us destroy the false image that the average child is truly enthusiastic about his day-to-day life at school. It is a long-established historical fact that school is a painful experience, and escape from school is a pleasant experience. It is not always true, but it is part of the folklore. We do not have students banging on doors demanding enlightenment, pleading for the chance to absorb all those magnificent truths.

THAT SCHOOL IS A PAINFUL EXPERIENCE AND ESCAPE FROM SCHOOL IS A PLEASANT EXPERIENCE IS PART OF THE FOLKLORE.

What we do have to deal with are human beings, just like you and me. They are good, normal, red-blooded, Canadian youths, who will do as much as they are forced to do and no more. As far as French is concerned, they are not inspired by the concept of national unity, by the excitement of a two-language nation. They are not burning with a desire to learn French.

LEARNING A SECOND LANGUAGE IS ACHIEVED ONLY BY HARD WORK.

It *is* possible to capture their interest with fascinating ideas, and we can inspire the group to focus attention as long as we whet their curiosity. But as soon as we move into the field of hard work, and learning a second language is achieved only by hard work, then we begin to lose them. There is a fascination in the idea of learning another language, but this romantic idea is fast dissipated when it becomes obvious to the students that to learn a second language, means: 1. a commitment of many, many years of hard concentration; 2. hours of study of vocabulary items, outside school time, at home; 3. hours of intensive practice in manipulating language patterns, outside school time; 4. developing not one skill, but 11 skills.

Ladies and gentlemen, I do not know if you have ever stopped to analyze what you are trying to do, but there are at least 11 skills that we try to develop in our students in our junior classroom. I had this up to 10; and then it suddenly struck me that the one thing we are trying to achieve is to produce communication, which is the goal of all language. Communication is to be listed as the eleventh skill. We never train students how to use what we teach them in French as communication; and that takes time, sitting with them and saying: imagine how you could use what we have just done out in these situations. It is almost like a creative drama class when you talk about it and get their imaginations working, training them how to use the little bit they know in the many places.

That's why you are so tired at the end of a day. It is not just teaching French. Actually, to analyze what we do, there are 11 different skills that we have in a basic lesson.

We as language teachers must take a very strong stand on this point. Learning French demands a lot of hard work; we must not fool the young people about this. And the rewards, the feeling of achievement, come slowly; this is why our students get so disenchanted. They do work hard sometimes, they do try sometimes, but it always seems that when they get up to say something, the word that they need or the verb that they need or the structure that they need is not the one that they have had so far; so they cannot say the idea that they want. And even if they do try, the teacher jumps up and down because they have said *j'ai allé* and not *je suis allé* and discourages them. Then they say: To hell with that, if I'm going to get jumped on every time I open my mouth, I'll sit here with my mouth shut.

But hard work does not have to be unpleasant. Unfortunately, it just is not held as an important value in our present society. We expect children to work hard within a classroom situation when society is saying: you don't really have to work very hard to make a living; the state may take care of you.

WE CAN TRAIN A STUDENT HOW TO USE HIS BASIC KNOWLEDGE CREATIVELY.

Two other factors that contribute to a slow development of language skills are the fact that we are trying to develop *individual* skills in a *group* situation (and you know that you cannot learn to play the piano by listening to someone else play), and the fact that there is no opportunity for reinforcement of the language experience outside the classroom (and even if there were, the sophistication of the natural language outside the classroom is *discouraging* to a dilettante, *not encouraging*). The unwise teacher who gets the students all tired out to run home to turn on the French T.V. channel instead of the English channel is creating absolute disaster for himself because the students sit in front of it, and there is so little they understand. They say: I've recognized *oui*, and I think he said *bonjour*, but they come to realize in that format how little they do know. And what we must be doing is building up how they can use the little they know. Have we ever taught them how to listen, how to listen for main ideas, as we teach them to read for main ideas?

ACCURACY IS AN IMPOSSIBLE GOAL UP TO THE END OF SECONDARY SCHOOL.

On the other hand, in a very positive light, let us inform the public of the miracles that we do achieve. The sad thing is that our achievements do not strike outsiders as miracles at all. They seem rather piffling. We cannot run up to the public and say: For the first time, they have really got the idea how to use this structure and this situation. Only another language teacher can empathize with such a situation. It is a lonely life, a very lonely life. And if you do speak to another language teacher, the other language teacher likely says: Oh! My kids got that last week. They didn't have any trouble with that.

What can the public expect the teachers of French to achieve in a standard classroom situation? I think this is where we are at and where we have to start. What can we achieve? We can open up a young person's mind and imagination to the wonder of knowing another language. Do we do that? Are our lessons of the types that open his mind to the magic of communication and language? Or are they drills and verb forms and pronoun replacements?

We can create in a student a positive attitude toward his endeavours and achievements in French so that he will be willing to continue to develop his skills throughout his life. Of how many students are we really capturing the interests and imaginations sufficiently to want them to stay and continue to perfect their skills. It is absolutely stupid to walk in front of kids and expect them to lap up whatever you present them. And yet when we think of our daily classes, what have we done from the moment they have come into our classroom to actually capture them and work on them?

We develop in a student an understanding and acceptance of what it means in time and effort to learn a second language. We must explain this to him, encourage him. We can provide him with classroom training and experiences that give him basic, limited, haltingly active vocabulary. We cannot expect him to have fast recall of words he uses once in a long time. But we can give him situations in the classroom in which he can keep the basic vocabulary at least alive. And we can provide him with basic, limited, haltingly active language patterns. We can train him to accept this imperfect stage as a successful realization of a goal along the way.

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 155 897 FL 009 497

AUTHOR Kenny, Morgan
TITLE French, The Impossible Dream.
INSTITUTION Alberta Teachers Association, Edmonton. Modern Language Council.
PUB DATE 78
NOTE 15p.
JOURNAL CIT Alberta Modern Language Journal; v16 n3 p19-32 Spr 1978

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Communicative Competence (Languages); *Community Attitudes; *Educational Objectives; Elementary Secondary Education; Expectation; *French; Instructional Materials; Language Attitudes; *Language Instruction; Language Programs; Language Skills; *Language Teachers; Official Languages; Public Opinion; Public Relations; Second Language Learning; Speech Communication; Student Attitudes; Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

Teaching French can be a rewarding experience, yet this has not always been the case in Canada, where French is one of the official languages. There is a general misunderstanding of the average child's life at school and of the time and effort needed to develop any control of a second language. Departments of Education, publishers, politicians, and the general public set unrealistic goals for idealistic situations. In addition, the children may have a negative attitude toward French. Teachers can communicate to the public and to students more realistic expectations of an ordinary French course. In the classroom they can be less concerned about complete accuracy and instead train students to accept imperfection along the way. Like creative drama directors, teachers can set up situations in which students will have to use their limited knowledge and skills to communicate real messages to real people. Over a period of years, teachers can develop in students some ability to understand French in natural unstructured situations, to read for main ideas, and write with a fair level of accuracy in structure and spelling. Finally, they can ensure that the program materials are sympathetic to students' problems and in line with realistic goals. (AMH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED155897

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Gaston Renaud

M L Council of OTA

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

French, The Possible Dream

by Morgan Kenny
Hamilton, Ontario

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

EDITOR'S NOTE: This paper is an edited version of the main presentation by the author as guest speaker at the MLC Annual Conference in Red Deer, Alberta, on October 22, 1977.

Preamble

I have taught Grades VII and VIII. I am teaching Grade VIII this year. I have worked in the elementary. I know your problems. Our elementary school goes up to Grade VIII; our secondary school starts at Grade IX; so there is a difference there.

I have stayed in the classroom. My job is as supervisor of languages, which means that I am responsible for curriculum in French, German and Latin for the city of Hamilton, Ontario, which is a city of about 350,000 people. I am responsible for 14 secondary schools, and over 100 elementary schools. I am supposed to make sure that we have the most excellent (*bestest*) teachers in the classroom doing the *bestest* job possible running an immersion program as well. And one reason why I have kept a class is because, psychologically, I like working with young people. I do not want to ever lose that contact. When I leave the class, I am floating high, and I realize that the actual contact with the young people is the important thing. Also, working with teachers all the time, I realize psychologically it gives me a weapon. When I have a meeting with them to talk about methodology, they cannot turn me off and say: "You don't know what it's like anymore. You are away from them. They're altogether different than those people you've taught." I am teaching them and that keeps the road of communication open between us.

FL009497

FRENCH, THE POSSIBLE DREAM.

There is nothing more exciting or rewarding than teaching. And if you're teaching French, there's nothing more exciting or rewarding than teaching French.

And yet the experience of the teacher of French has not been a happy one. It's difficult to imagine any group of educators that has been more influenced by unrealistic expectations, by distorting and destructive input from professional and amateur sources.

There are two main reasons for this unhappy state: 1. There is a general misunderstanding of the average child's day-to-day life at school (nothing to do with French; just life at school). 2. There is a misunderstanding of the time and effort that is needed by an average child in an average school to develop any control of a second language.

How do these misconceptions manifest themselves in the attitudes of the groups who influence the teachers and students of French?

Department of Education

Let us consider the departments of education to begin with. In an effort to humanize the learning experience, departments of education depict the classroom as a Garden of Eden before the Apple. Children are divested of the more unpleasant and undesirable human traits and imbued with Utopian, angelic qualities. In this departmental heaven-on-earth, the omniscient teacher satisfies the individual needs of her 30 keenly-motivated, well-disciplined students.

DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION DEPICT THE CLASSROOM AS A GARDEN OF EDEN BEFORE THE APPLE.

Those of us who are successful teachers, who do inspire learning, find it difficult to relate to the Department's depiction of school life to our daily battle against noise and indifference; our battle against unfortunate

family backgrounds, emotional problems, physical defects; our battle against all the "fun" things there are to do, which unfortunately have no place in the immediate learning situation. And yet, it is in the context of this daily battle that mass education takes place. And it does take place. But slowly, haltingly, and within very human limitations.

TEACHERS AND STUDENTS ARE LOCKED INTO STRIVING TO MAKE AN IMPOSSIBLE DREAM POSSIBLE.

Because there is such a variance between a Department's abstracted view and the reality of the classroom, there must be an ensuing variance between the goals established by a Department for a French program, and the actual goals that can be achieved by a classroom teacher working with average human beings. Unfortunately, the ideal guideline of the Department is interpreted as law by the administrators in each community, and, therefore, becomes classroom law for principals, for teachers, for students. And so we have teachers and students striving after the *impossible dream* and experiencing daily frustration and disenchantment.

The Publishers

Another group that has a strong influence on a student's life at school is the publisher. It is he who produces the materials that embody the program established by the Department. If a publisher wants to stay in business, he must ensure that his authors write to Departments' dictates. And so the materials produced for the classroom are written for those ideal creatures and courses conceived by the Departments. In this way, teachers and students are locked into striving to make an impossible dream possible. Only unhappiness and frustration, and dropping enrolment can result from this.

The Public

The next group to consider is the general public: the parents, the taxpayers.

The general public is insensitive to the actual conditions in an average classroom. Because they do not have the chance to know what day-to-day life at school is like, people

My little Grade VIII class I told you about has had one year of French (Grade VII). And the first week of school, on the third day, I decided to hand out textbooks. I just went along and I pushed down on the desk the number I thought they needed. I shortchanged this row, so a young boy came up to me and said: "I need three more books." So I said: "Look! you don't know how to say *I need*, but can you get that idea across to me in French?" He stopped for a moment and it did not take him long. We used *Ici on parle français, Level I* in Grade VII. He went back to "le Piquenique" and he said: "Donne-moi, donne-moi livre." So I picked up one book and I gave it to him. He said: "No." I said: "That's the message I got. What's wrong with the communication here. Is it my fault or your fault that the communication has broken down?" "Donne-moi quatre livres." And that moment, I turned on the taping machine. Do you realize what he has just done? He has had one year and two days of French, and look! By using the little bit he knows, but not getting stuck on things he doesn't know, he was able to get a message across to me. And this is what we want to do all year. "We want to get you in a position where you can take the little you know and make it work for you and add life. Then we don't want to leave you there. We want to get you going on, and going on. And often I'll help you all I can. You just beg me for more; I'll give you more." Somebody will raise his hands and say: "How would you say this?" And I say: "Oh! don't worry about that. You don't want to know about that"..."But I do want to know"... "No, no, no, another day." It's not that I do not want to; it is because I want to create an attitude that I am not the one that is forcing it down their throats. But, once in a while, a volunteer interest comes from the other side. I do not think we do this. This is what I call communication: showing them that they can use little bits of language.

WE CAN STRIVE TO FREE OURSELVES OF OUR PERSONAL PET THEORIES.

How many of you have ever set them in a situation in which, let's pretend, you are down in the province of Québec and you're travelling to some relatives with your mum and dad. Now they have left the main road. They want to go and look at a river. It takes them a way down off the main road. And now we are in an area where people do not speak English, because they are away from other areas. And my gosh! A tire blows out on the car, the car veers off the road, hits a tree, and both

your parents are killed. You must go to a nearby farm and explain what happened, and try to get help. How would you express yourself with the limited French you have? This is what I mean by giving him the classroom training and experience that show him how to make use of his limited vocabulary and structure particularly to get the message across to French-speaking people.

THEORIES CREATE IMBALANCE AND PREVENT US FROM ACHIEVING THE POSSIBLE.

We can train a student how to use his basic knowledge creatively, if imperfectly. Imperfectly - by that I mean who cares whether it is imperfect if the message gets across. These kids have got so little to work with. At this moment, it is the message. We keep working on accuracy all the time they are with us, if they stay with us. We never get a chance to perfect them when they leave us. But if we can hold on to them, we will keep working at the accuracy.

We can develop in a student a limited ability to understand French spoken by unknown voices in natural unstructured situations. We can train him to read French for main ideas. We can enable him to write French with a fair level of accuracy in structure and spelling.

A fair level of accuracy! I avoid the word *accuracy*. Accuracy is an impossible goal up to the end of secondary school. As a matter of fact, if you are allowed to read some honor French students' papers at university level, I am afraid you would not find the accuracy level there. Then why do we make it a goal of those that are belonging to the mass education.

We can ensure that the program materials we use are sympathetic to all the problems facing the average student. That is your responsibility as teachers. Are your materials sympathetic to the problems that face your students in learning a second language? Do they provide a training that will lead them to a feeling of achievement? If they achieve, they are content. If they are content, they pay attention and learn. If they do not achieve, they are frustrated. If they are frustrated, you have lost one of your audience.

We can strive to free ourselves of our personal pet theories and of those of linguists and psychologists, theories that create imbalance and prevent us from achieving the possible. I do not mean that we should not know everything that is being said that is important in the field of linguistics, as it applies to teaching children; not pure theory. Nor that we should know all the information provided by psychologists. But we are the in-between persons. We are the ones who must take the theory or the research, and apply it to the 30 human beings in a living situation. And it is not the same thing. The idea put into action can become tragedy unless the teacher is in between to transmit, to translate, to make it a living experience for the young people.

These are possible goals we can set for ourselves. And we must make no apology for them. They are major achievements.

This is the possible dream for our students. This is the possible dream that we must share with the public, and for some of us, it is a dream that has already come true. ■

FRENCH FILMS EVALUATIONS NATIONAL FILM BOARD

OFFICE NATIONAL DU FILM EVALUATION DES FILMS

The Film Committee of the B.C.A.T.M.L. (British Columbia Association of Teachers of Modern Languages) has published a 50-page catalogue in which some 76 French-language N.F.B. films have been evaluated. For each film, description of the following aspects are given: general rating as to quality, length, date produced, photographic quality, price, major purpose, interest level(s), vocabulary level(s), and, finally, special strengths or weaknesses. The second part of this publication consists of the N.F.B. catalogue descriptions of the same films giving a summary of their contents.

If you are interested in obtaining a copy of this publication, write to:

Rachelle Cournoyer
National Film Board
10030 - 103 Street
EDMONTON, Alberta